

Heroism explored in documentary Pueblo men focus of PBS special

By ANDREW WINEKE THE GAZETTE

For 20 years, Bill Crawford worked as a custodian at the Air Force Academy. The cadets were inevitably shocked when they heard that the shy, quiet man mopping the floor had earned the Congressional Medal of Honor — the nation's highest military honor — for single-handedly taking out three German machine gun positions in World War II.

"It happened over and over and over again," says Pete Lemon, a close friend of Crawford's. "Here's this shy man swabbing the floors of the hallways and they don't have a clue who he is, and once they do, they're in awe."

Lemon understood Crawford's heroism better than most, having won the Medal of Honor himself during the Vietnam War. The two men met after Lemon moved to Colorado Springs in 1981, and Lemon soon learned about the three other Medal of Honor winners from Pueblo — Korean War veterans Carl Sitter and Raymond "Jerry" Murphy and Vietnam veteran Drew Dix.

The four men are the subject of "Beyond the Medal of Honor," a new PBS documentary by Lemon and filmmaker Brad Padula that will air at 7 p.m. Wednesday on KTSC/Channel 8 and on PBS stations nationwide in November.

How does a little town like Pueblo produce four heroes in three wars? It's an obvious question without an easy answer.

"Here you have a small Colorado town, four recipients, three wars and they each have their own very unique story," Lemon says. "I thought, 'We are missing a part of history unless we capture this.'"

Lemon decided to tell the four medal winners' stories to preserve them and, he hoped, to inspire others.

Crawford died a month and a half after Lemon and his coproducers, Padula and Frank Provenza, began shooting the film in 2000, and Sitter died a few weeks later.

The filmmakers pressed on with research, assembling archival footage and recording interviews, eventually getting funding from the Ross Perot Foundation. The project took four and a half years to complete and resulted in a four-hour mini-series, which was edited into the two-hour PBS documentary. The complete series, along with educational materials, will be given to more than 17,000 high schools across the country.

The documentary tells each man's story, both the actions that earned him the Medal of Honor and what he did with his life afterward.

Despite being wounded, Sitter led his men in defending their position and then retreating from an overwhelming Chinese force during the infamous battle of Chosin Reservoir in 1950. He later worked with the elderly and was in seminary school when he died.

Murphy led a rescue effort after a Marine position in Korea was overrun in 1953, refusing to leave the battlefield until all of the wounded were evacuated. He still volunteers at the Veterans Administration hospital in Albuquerque.

Amid the Tet Offensive of 1968, Dix led a team into a city overrun by the Viet Cong, rescuing several civilians and capturing a Viet Cong general in the process. Today, he is a consultant for the Department of Homeland Security.

Lemon hopes viewers will learn there isn't anything unique and unattainable within those four men; they just made the right decision and took action when they had to.

"That's the essence of the film," Lemon says, "in our country, anybody can step up. All they have to do is make that first step."

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TO VIEW

"Beyond the Medal of Honor"

What: A two-hour PBS documentary on the four Pueblo men who have won the Congressional Medal of Honor When: 7 p.m. Wednesday on KTSC/Channel 8 Information: www.beyondthemedal.com



MARK REIS, THE GAZETTE - A LABOR OF LOVE: Medal of Honor recipient Pete Lemon of Colorado Springs worked 4 1/2 years to research, assemble archival footage and record interviews for what would be a two hour documentary on Pueblo's four Medal of Honor winners.